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RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA 1144
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000160

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: MP ON "PRO-SENATE" FACTION ACTIVITIES, PLANS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

[¶1.](#) (C) MDC pro-senate faction MP Priscilla Misihairabwa-Mushonga told poloff February 2 that little progress had been made in resolving the dispute that had split the MDC, though the tone was improving. She said the biggest challenge facing her faction was selecting a national leader. She reported that pro-senate members would work through "the system" but also employ civic action as a political tool. The faction intended to focus on local bread-and-butter issues, including the GOZ,s failed land reform, in its drive to press an increasingly divided ruling party and restore its own credibility with the public. End summary.

Toward a Factional Modus Vivendi

[¶2.](#) (C) Mushonga asserted that little progress had been made in working out a modus vivendi between the two factions, although tensions and public rancor were subsiding. She was unaware of formal "divorce talks", although members from each side were talking informally. Mechanisms for communication and cooperation between the factions in parliament had yet to be worked out. She claimed that 23 of the MDC's 41 MPs were in the pro-Senate camp, with David Coltart in neither.

[¶3.](#) (C) Aside from addressing rights to the party name and assets, the factions had to work out an arrangement for their parliamentary delegation. Most recognized that challenging

each other's seats would be self-defeating - as loathed as ZANU-PF was, the MDC's loss of credibility and debilitated organizational capacity meant the ruling party would win most by-elections. Each side, however, had elements that were pushing for further confrontation, including legal battles and by-elections.

Congress Bedevilled by Leadership Challenge

¶4. (C) Mushonga said the faction's upcoming congress's fundamental challenge would be to select a leader. She identified three possible outcomes - first, an organizational leader to rebuild the party's base but not necessarily be a national presidential candidate; second, retaining acting president Gibson Sibanda to serve as a care-taker president for a limited period; and third, a wide-open election for a full-term powerful leader.

¶5. (C) She noted that Welshman Ncube and Gibson Sibanda each told her they would not run in an open contest in view of the party's need for a Shona leader with national appeal. (N.B. Pro-senate MP Abednigo Ncube subsequently told poloff that Kwekwe MP Blessing Chebundo was emerging as a possible Shona leadership candidate.) She wouldn't predict the outcome but said she personally favored the first option, primarily to forestall further potential division.

Using GOZ Institutions, Civic Action

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¶6. (C) Mushonga reiterated that even though the "pro-senate" faction would continue to pursue influence and power through existing institutions of Government, the faction recognized the value of civic action. Most did not believe the political landscape would permit mass action to effect a change in power soon. However, the faction's members planned to exploit local opportunities and collaborate with civil society in projecting opposition to the regime, principally on bread-and-butter issues such as food, prices, housing, and municipal services. In that vein, they were attempting to collaborate with civil society in preparation for their Party Congress in late February, but most NGOs were effectively aligned with the Tsvangirai faction and keeping their distance.

Municipal Challenges, Opportunities

¶7. (C) Turning to municipal politics, Mushonga said the parties were likely to be contending elections against each other in three-way races with ZANU-PF. She said this would likely cede some MDC-controlled municipalities to ZANU-PF, except in Matabeleland, where each faction would tally more than the ruling party. ZANU-PF's co-opting of local governments wasn't necessarily bad since the opposition would exploit the inevitable failures to rally the public against it. Indeed, as municipal services collapsed, MDC representatives could gain substantial political capital by organizing rate boycotts or private community service enterprises to address sanitation and other needs.

Taking Ownership of Land Issue

¶8. (C) On a national level, Mushonga said the pro-senate faction intended to make particular hay out of ZANU-PF's failure to deliver on land reform, an issue that remained emotionally and economically important to most Zimbabweans. The putative beneficiaries of land reform, "new farmers" were

a key ZANU-PF constituency ripe for the picking. The faction intended to hold out the promise of property rights to these farmers, which would be especially crucial in making inroads into Mashonaland, ZANU-PF's most important bastion.

ZANU-PF Outwardly Disciplined, Inwardly Divided

¶9. (C) Mushonga said that, driven by succession tensions and growing national economic distress ZANU-PF was in increasing ferment. She nonetheless expected its MPs to remain disciplined and ultimately deliver the succession-related constitutional amendments being prepared for introduction into the parliament. Passage of the amendment, however, would do nothing to ameliorate tensions within the party.

¶10. (C) Mushonga said the United People's Movement and the United People's Party served a useful purpose in fueling divisions within the ruling party but predicted they would ultimately amount to little. Despite increasingly vocal dissatisfaction within the ruling party, she did not expect any ZANU-PF defections to either third party, or to either MDC faction for that matter. Dislodging or breaking up ZANU-PF would still take time, she concluded.

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¶11. (C) A regular mbassy interlocutor in her former capacity of Seretary for Foreign Affairs in the unified MDC, th normally ebullient Mushonga conceded she had neve been so down. Apart from the stress and disappointment of the party's split, her husband was inthe process of taking a job in Botswana. Accordng to Mushonga, her husband was one of Harare's 1st two orthopedic surgeons. He was making US\$50/month in Harare but would command a starting salay of US\$3000/month in Botswaa. In addition, the decline of medical infrastructure and personnel, scarcity of medical supplies, and economic distress of his patient base had made his Zimbabwe practice "unbearable."

Comment

¶12. (C) With the divisive senate election behind them, the factions' respective strategies are fundamentally similar: each involves some combination of working through the system and stepping up overt opposition to the regime. The rancor between the two leaderships will not dissipate completely but reduced tensions likely foreshadow the emergence of a practical modus vivendi and eventual reunification cannot be ruled out. Many members of both factions would seem to prefer a unified party, even if they appear to have given up for now on reconciliation efforts.

DELL